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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, April 10, 2008

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Muskegon Chronicle

Mom's ex-boyfriend faces trial in baby's death

Thursday, April 10, 2008

By John S. Hausman

jhausman@muskegonchronicle.com

MUSKEGON -- A murder hearing Wednesday reopened old wounds for the mother of a baby who died more than four years ago.

Crystal Bell, in tears, had to leave the courtroom before a scheduled preliminary examination for Marcus Tulenkun Bolden, 23, of 2216 Peck. Bolden is charged with open murder in the death Feb. 1, 2004, of Bell's son, Houston Mikell Curtis, just three days after the baby's first birthday.

Bolden -- in jail recently for another misdemeanor child abuse case -- made admissions to police that led to his arrest last month. Bolden reportedly told police that, upset by Houston's crying early Jan. 31, 2004, while the mother was in another room of her apartment, he threw the baby onto a bed. The child bounced and struck the wall, severely injuring his head.

Although police never gave up on the cold case, its solution until recently had been frustrated because of a number of complexities that resulted in dead ends for investigators.

Bolden ended up waiving his right to Wednesday's probable-cause hearing in Muskegon's 60th District Court. Judge Michael J. Nolan ordered him bound over for trial in 14th Circuit Court.

At the time of the death, Bolden and Bell had started dating. Bolden was not the baby's father.

According to Crystal Bell's father, Calvin Bell of Muskegon, his daughter had not seen Bolden in almost all the time since then. Seeing him again was upsetting to the baby's now 25-year-old mother "because it rehashed certain memories. It was just an emotional day," Calvin Bell said.

"I'm just happy for my daughter today, so that she can get some closure," he said. Crystal Bell declined to speak with reporters.

The small courtroom was packed with members of both the Bell and the Bolden families. Members of Bolden's family declined comment.

Houston Curtis died at DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, the day after he was injured.

Bolden was sentenced on Feb. 25 of this year to 120 days in the Muskegon County Jail for fourth-degree child abuse. He was arrested last November by Muskegon Heights police after he tried to hit his girlfriend and instead struck her young daughter, prosecutors said.

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The News-Herald

A Heritage Newspaper

Mother sought in boy's disappearance

By Jim Kasuba
, The News-Herald

In the case of most kidnappings, the victim knows his or her kidnapper.

In fact, in most instances the kidnapper is a noncustodial parent, authorities say.

That's the case with Alice Nieman, whose last known address was in Lincoln Park. Police believe the 32-year-old woman took her 8-year-old son, Shawn, in mid-March and disappeared after a judge changed the child's custody.

Jessica Webster said her husband, Shawn, had joint legal custody of his son until Nieman took him out of school and began to home school him.

Home schooling is legal in Michigan and is considered to be an effective way of educating children.

Webster said the court agreed with her husband, however, that the boy would have a more stable home life with his father and her. They both are professionals with steady jobs, she said.

"My husband was given sole legal custody," Webster said. "He went to get him and he wasn't there. She had moved out of the house."

Webster said the last communication between her husband and Nieman was March 17. He text-messed her that a judge had signed a court order and that she must comply with it. She replied to the message with a voicemail message.

"She said she was out of town and that this is not going to happen," Webster said.

About three weeks ago police narrowed down her location through a cell phone. There were two "hits" in Dearborn and one in Taylor, so police believe that, at least initially, Nieman wasn't too far away.

The couple, who reside in Wyandotte, has been in touch with the Police Department, which continues to seek the woman and missing child.

Detective Lt. Bobie Heck said one avenue in helping police find Nieman is to let the public know that they're looking for her. The case also has been reported to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children.

Webster said Nieman quit her job and closed her bank account.

"There is a felony warrant for her arrest for parental kidnapping," Webster said.

Anyone with information on the whereabouts of Nieman or her son, Shawn, is asked to contact Wyandotte police at 1-734-324-4405.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.thenewsherald.com/stories/040908/loc_20080409008.shtml

Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

Child found in Buchanan drug house

Wednesday, April 9, 2008 12:07 PM EDT

BUCHANAN - Buchanan City police arrested a 24-year-old man suspected of trafficking in crack cocaine on Tuesday, April 8 at 7 a.m.

The Buchanan City Police Department, along with the Berrien County Narcotics unit and the Berrien County Tactical Response Unit, served a narcotics search warrant at 320 Artic St., in the City of Buchanan.

A 5th district judge reviewed Buchanan Police Department's investigation information in regards to suspected drug dealing at that address and authorized the search warrant.

Taurean Travantei Young, 24, of the address was found inside the residence at the time the Tactical Response Unit entered the home. Along with Young was his 3-year-old daughter and a brother, 21-year-old, Raasean Lanier Young of Stockbridge, Ga.

Suspected drugs, drug paraphernalia and suspected drug money were located in the house. These items, along with two firearms, were secured by Buchanan Officers Bovo, Leonard Howell and Troup.

The investigation into Young's activities were brought on by anonymous tips from the public.

Young was charged with delivery of crack cocaine, possession of marijuana and maintaining a drug house. His previous criminal record prevents him from possessing any firearms at any time. He was also charged with two counts of possessing a firearm while being a felon. A pistol and an assault rifle were found in the home.

Young was transported and lodged at the Berrien County Jail on the above charges.

Raasean Lanier Young was issued a citation for disorderly person - being an occupant of a drug house. He was cited and released.

The 3-year-old child was turned over to another relative who lived nearby shortly after the house was entered. The entry was made without any significant event and no injuries occurred to the occupants of the house or the police officers.

"I continue to be pleased by the public's willingness to help identifying suspicious activities in their neighborhoods and our success in addressing these issues. People don't want this activity in their neighborhood and they seem to be willing to make the calls to help us do something about it. It is working and I just want to add that any anonymous call with information to the police department is always welcomed," said Chief William Marx, Buchanan City Police Department.

The Buchanan City Police Department can be reached at, 107 W. Front St., Buchanan, (269) 695-5120.

Updated: 4/10/2008 5:56:47 AM

Child advocates set fundraiser

BY GREG NELSON

Sun Staff Writer

Nowadays, coming up with the money to provide needed programs for state and local human service organizations can be a difficult task.

That's why Audra Stahl, child abuse and neglect prevention coordinator for Child Advocacy 4C of Central Michigan, decided to take matters into her own hands.

She's organized a fundraising 5K run and one-mile walk to help the agency raise money for the program she oversees.

The event will take place Saturday at the Central Michigan Youth for Christ Student Center at 2550 Cheesman Road in Alma.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. with the walk starting at 9:30 a.m. and the run at 10 a.m.

Adults and children of all ages are invited to take part.

The registration fee is \$20 per person or \$25 with a T-shirt.

April 9, 2008

AHMED SAYS SETTLEMENT COULD HAPPEN IN FOSTER CARE CASE

Settlement discussions with the national group suing the state over its foster care system are promising, Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed told the House Families and Children's Services Committee during a case update on Wednesday.

"We hope for a settlement and it's going well, but barring a settlement, we are vigorously defending ourselves," Mr. Ahmed told the committee, adding that his department is currently in negotiations with Children's Rights about federal timelines, threshold levels and other objectives.

He described the federal lawsuit as a "double edged sword" because, although it could potentially break the department by costing up to \$400 million a year if DHS loses the case, it will also inevitably lead to a dramatically improved foster care system.

"Michigan couldn't bear the \$400 million," Mr. Ahmed said. "On the other hand, as a result of this suit, we will make significant reformation in child welfare and specifically in foster care."

The director also gave legislators a sneak peek into some of his plans for improvement, which include an outcome task force he plans to formally introduce in two weeks.

That group will be made up of the "best and brightest" in the public and private sectors, he said, and their mission will be to develop benchmarks for the department to use within one year, "so (Mr. Ahmed) doesn't spend (his) whole time here talking about outcomes and not bringing them to the Legislature."

Within four years, depending on the outcome of the federal suit, the director said he hopes to have foster care caseloads down to 15 cases for every one worker, along with cost neutral practices in place and best practices identified.

Injured baby prompts license suspension at daycare facility

Owner to face child abuse charges

By Heidi Roman
C & G Staff Writer

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Parents are being asked not to bring their children back to the My Home Away From Home daycare facility while state licensing agencies and prosecutors review an incident that left a 7-month-old child injured.

Shannon Renee Jacob, 39, operates a home daycare facility on Kolleen Lane in Clinton Township, near Harper Avenue and I-94. Police believe she shook and injured a child who was under her care on March 4, and she is expected to be charged with first-degree child abuse, a 15-year felony.

“A woman from Eastpointe dropped her 7-month-old off at the daycare,” said Capt. Richard Maierle. “It was only his second day there.”

The child was fine when he was dropped off, Maierle said. The mother told police she received a phone call during the day from Jacob, who told her the child had thrown up, but was otherwise fine. When she picked her son up at 5:30 p.m. that day, she could tell something was wrong, police said.

The baby was taken to a local hospital. Medical examiners suspected the child had suffered abuse head trauma, and called Clinton Township police to investigate.

“We have an expert at (the hospital) saying the injury was caused at the daycare that day,” Maierle said.

The baby appears to be doing fine now, he adds.

The Macomb County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office filed charges against Jacob, who at press time had not yet turned herself in.

Maierle said she has retained an attorney.

The investigation prompted the Michigan Department of Human Services, Office of Children and Adult Licensing, to suspend Jacob's license to operate the daycare center.

"Because this is a summary suspension, number one, she's not allowed to offer any day care during the suspension," said Colleen Steinman, a spokesperson for the Michigan Department of Human Services. "We will schedule a hearing, and she would have an opportunity to respond to any issues found in the complaint."

Jacob's license was suspended because of "problems with caregiver qualifications and supervision," Steinman said.

According to a press release issued by the agency, Jacob's license was suspended as of 6 p.m. April 2 as an "emergency action to protect the health, welfare and safety of children."

The suspension requires her to notify all of the parents of the children in her care that she can no longer provide services, according to the release.

Jacob has been licensed to operate the group daycare home since 2004, and is able to provide services for 12 children.

At press time, no hearing date had been set regarding her license.

Police said there have been no other complaints or issues at the facility in the past.

You can reach Staff Writer Heidi Roman at hroman@candgnews.com or at (586) 218-5006.



Muskegon Chronicle

Man sentenced in attack on father

Thursday, April 10, 2008

MUSKEGON COUNTY -- A 29-year-old Egelston Township man has been sentenced to jail for attacking his father and causing a serious injury.

Muskegon County Circuit Judge James M. Graves Jr. last week ordered Nicholas George Richards, 530 S. Wolf Lake, to jail for a year for assault with intent to maim, with credit for 91 days already served, and "time served" for resisting and obstructing police. Richards also must serve three years on probation. Richards pleaded no contest to the charges March 11.

Muskegon County Sheriff's deputies were called to the Richards residence at 1:04 a.m. on New Year's Day.

A report said Richards, who appeared to be intoxicated, had come home and barged into the bedroom where his parents were sleeping. He allegedly jumped on top of his 55-year-old father and started beating him.

The father tried to defend himself and the two fought throughout the house, police said. Holes were found in the walls and debris was scattered about.

The report said the elder Richards suffered a severe laceration to his scrotum after his son allegedly tried to tear it off. The injury was treated at Hackley Hospital. The father also sustained a shoulder injury.

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Michigan likely to be first state issuing food stamps twice a month

Posted by [David Eggert | The Associated Press](#)

April 08, 2008 18:25PM

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Michigan is closer to becoming the first state in the nation to issue food stamps twice monthly, despite most recipients preferring to get the government assistance once a month.

Legislation that would make the change passed the House 87-19 Tuesday and is headed to Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who's expected to sign it. Roadblocks may remain at the federal level, however.

Supporters say the proposed law will make fresh food more available throughout the month and help grocery stores better manage their inventory. Michigan's 1.2 million food stamp recipients now have their benefits added to a debit card in the first nine days of the month, causing a rush to grocery stores and some say a lack of quality food later in the month in urban areas.

The Democratic-led House approved the bill despite the results of a Michigan Department of Human Services survey, in which 59 percent of food stamp recipients said they preferred continuing to receive their benefits once a month. Thirty-five percent favored going to a twice-a-month system. The survey of 1,037 recipients was conducted at local DHS offices March 19-25 and had a sampling error margin of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, according to DHS.

A message seeking comment was left with DHS officials, who had been neutral on the bills and had insisted on surveying recipients to find out their preferences. A message also was left for Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, who sponsored House legislation to issue food stamps twice monthly.

Jane Shallal, president of the Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers, which supports the switch, said the survey results weren't that compelling and questioned whether people getting less assistance were the ones less likely to want their benefits split into two payments a month.

The legislation would only affect families getting \$100 or more a month in benefits. That's about 78 percent of the state's caseload. Those receiving less than \$100 would keep getting their assistance once a month.

Moving to a twice-monthly distribution system may hit hurdles in the federal government, which pays for food stamps. A farm bill being negotiated in Congress includes a provision that would ban states from changing food stamp distribution from once a month. Shallal said Tuesday's House vote -- the state Senate acted last month -- may help persuade federal lawmakers to delete the provision.

The state and U.S. government share administrative costs to distribute food stamps. The nonpartisan state House Legislative Analysis Section says it would cost about \$900,000 to change the state's computer system to issue food stamps twice monthly.

Retailers say once-a-month food assistance is spent early and usually all at once, causing them problems with staffing, cash flow and inventory. Advocates for the poor say food stamp recipients aren't buying enough healthy, fresh food throughout the month.

Others, however, say some recipients have limited transportation and prefer using their money to buy in bulk for better purchasing power.

The food stamp bill is Senate Bill 120.

April 8, 2008

FOOD STAMP PAYMENT BILL PASSES HOUSE

The Department of Human Services would have to give people receiving more than \$100 a month in food assistance two payments each month instead of one under legislation passed by the House Tuesday on an 87-19 vote.

[SB 120](#) was returned to the Senate without any changes, but that chamber did not give clerks permission to enroll bills while senators are on break, so the measure won't be sent to the governor for at least another week.

Getting the bill through the House (the legislation is the same as [HB 4923](#), which was already on third reading in the chamber) was a bit delayed Tuesday as key lawmakers huddled with officials from the Granholm administration, including DHS.

The department has been neutral on the bill, but has argued the twice-a-month disbursement system would require additional staff DHS doesn't have to handle calls from food assistance recipients about the change. They have also argued the change could receive a challenge by the federal government. While DHS officials had been willing to go with a 19-day disbursement period to spread out payments to all recipients, instead of the current 10 days as a way of helping grocers with a steadier stream of business, the bill did not incorporate that proposal.

Grocers and distributors support the two-payment system because it evens out demand for fresh food throughout the month.



Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers Succeeds in Its Efforts for Twice-Monthly Food Stamp Distribution

FARMINGTON HILLS, Mich., April 8, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- On Tuesday, April 8, the Michigan House of Representatives voted in Senate Bill 120, which will make Michigan the first state in the nation to issue food stamps twice each month. The bill passed on an 87 to 19 vote. Governor Granholm is expected to sign the legislation into law.

On March 12, Senate Bill 120 -- which changes food stamp distribution from once to twice monthly -- passed on a 35-2 vote. It was then sent to the House, where it was voted on and passed on April 8. Michigan's 1.2 million food stamp recipients -- the highest number ever -- currently have their benefits added to a debit card once a month, early in the month.

The Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers (AFPD) and other supporters say the bill will make fresh food more readily available to food stamp recipients throughout the month and help grocery stores with their inventory.

"AFPD has been aggressively seeking a change in this law for many years on behalf of Michigan's food retailers," said Jane Shallal, president of the Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers. "The previous once-monthly distribution cycle made it very difficult for retailers, wholesalers and suppliers to manage deliveries, staffing, and inventory while maintaining quality control of perishables," Shallal added.

As part of its efforts, AFPD presented research, which demonstrated that the once-monthly distribution cycle contributed to food insecurity vulnerability in food stamp recipient households.

The Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers is the voice of the food, beverage and fuel industries in Michigan and Ohio. Representing nearly 4,000 retailers, wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers since 1910. AFPD's executive offices are in Farmington Hills, Michigan with branch offices in Lansing, Michigan and Dublin, Ohio.

SOURCE Associated Food & Petroleum Dealers

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Union Applauds Bi-Partisan Action to Make Michigan the First State to Issue Food Stamps Twice a Month

MADISON HEIGHTS, Mich., April 9 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Michigan is one step closer to becoming the first state in the nation to issue food stamps twice a month, with yesterday's passage by Michigan State House of SB 120, a move that is being applauded by the union representing grocery workers in Michigan.

"It's a win-win for everyone involved -- Michigan's workers, consumers and retailers," Roger Robinson, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 876, said. "We applaud the bi-partisan action of both the Michigan house and senate in their passage of this legislation. For almost two years, UFCW Locals 876 and 951 have been advocating for this change to the distribution of food stamps. It's encouraging to see that our representatives in Lansing can put partisan politics aside to benefit the people of Michigan."

The advantages of twice a month distribution include:

- Greater shopping and budgeting flexibility for food stamp recipients who would be less likely to run out of food stamps before the end of the month, and be able to purchase fresh product throughout the month.

- A greater and more even distribution of work hours for grocery store employees. Currently, these workers' hours are often cut during the last 20 days of the month, coinciding with the drop in shopping experienced after the distribution of food stamps.

- Elimination of the financial, management and inventory problems experienced by retailers, suppliers, wholesalers, and manufacturers as a result of the current food stamp distribution system.

- A greater selection of fresh food for all shoppers. Currently, many grocers are unable to stock fresh meat, dairy and produce during the last 20 days of the month when their business is reduced due to once a month food stamp distribution.

The bill now heads to Governor Jennifer Granholm who is expected to sign it.

"We fully anticipate that Governor Granholm will make Michigan the first state in the country to issue food stamps twice a month," Marv Russow, UFCW Local 951 president, said. "The change is good for the people of Michigan, and Governor Granholm has a strong history of siding with Michigan families and workers."

SB 120 was sponsored by Martha Scott (D-Highland Park).

Madison Heights based UFCW Local 876 and Grand Rapids based UFCW Local 951 have a combined membership of approximately 50,000 workers, the majority of whom are retail grocery workers employed by Kroger, Meijer, Hiller's, Hollywood Supermarkets, Plumb's, Polly's, and Harding's. To provide their members with the strongest political voice possible, the two locals work together on all political efforts.

SOURCE United Food and Commercial Workers Local 876

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More children are homeless in Kalamazoo County

Posted by [Chris Killian](#) | [Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette](#)

April 10, 2008 09:49AM



Jill McLane Baker | Kalamazoo Gazette

Lee Ligon reads the newspaper while passing time at Ministry With Community Wednesday morning. Ligon says that until he has a place of his own, the daytime shelter acts as his "living room."

KALAMAZOO -- The number of homeless people and homeless households in Kalamazoo County dropped slightly over the past year, but a rise was seen in the number of children who are homeless, officials said Wednesday.

A count held Jan. 31 at several area shelters, drop-in centers and other agencies recorded 681 homeless people in the county, including 262 children, according to preliminary data from the one-day count.

The 2007 count found 692 homeless people, including 235 children.

The count provides only a snapshot of the homeless population in the county, homeless advocates said.

• [Advocates decry](#)

"The totals don't represent the entire population over the year," said Annie Wendt, epidemiologist with the [Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services](#) Department. "It only indicates those we could capture on that one day. The total is significantly higher than what we found."

Officials are considering holding another count this summer, Wendt said.

Loss of employment, lack of affordable housing, addiction and eviction were the primary reasons given by those who were homeless, according to the report.

The number of homeless households, meaning a household composed solely of homeless individuals, dropped from 437 in 2007 to 393 in 2008.

Of the 2008 total, 44.6 percent of the individuals had been without a home for at least six months, 41.8 percent had been homeless more than once and 26.6 percent had their last permanent address outside of the county.

Data showed 8.1 percent of households included a U.S. military veteran, 31.9 percent included a person who was employed and 72.4 had member with at least a high school diploma or GED.

The 2008 count showed a drop in the number of homeless people who are not staying in shelters, but instead living with family or friends.

['war on homeless'](#)
- March 4, 2008

• [Survey puts face on homeless](#) -
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12:15 pm, April 10, 2008

Report: Income disparity in state is increasing

By Sherri Begin

The wealthiest 5 percent of Michigan's population has enjoyed a 48 percent pay hike since the 1980s, while the poorest fifth of the state's households have seen incomes increase just less than 9 percent during the same period, a new report says.

"Pulling Apart: A State-by-State Analysis of Income Trends," was released Wednesday by the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** and the **Economy Policy Institute**, both based in Washington, D.C.

The full report is available at www.cbpp.org/4-9-08sfp.htm.

The widening gap between the two Michigan populations "casts a shadow on our future," said Ann Marston, president and CEO of the **Michigan League for Human Services**, which works closely with the report's authors, in a release.

"For Michigan to prosper, we need more than the rich getting richer. It means that people across the board have opportunities to get decent-paying jobs and improve the quality of their lives, too," she said.

According to the report, Michigan wages sagged across all income groups in the 1990s, when adjusted for inflation.

However, while the richest 5 percent of families maintained their income level, the poorest fifth of Michigan households lost an average of 11 percent of their income over the same period.

The **Michigan Department of Human Services** and the **Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity** have scheduled a summit at Cobo Center Nov. 13 to discuss statewide poverty, according to the release.

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CQ WEEKLY
April 7, 2008 – Page 866

States & Localities: Management Matters

By Peter Harkness, CQ Columnist

About half the states are now in some form of fiscal distress, and the roster seems to be growing by the week. Deterioration in the states' revenue is likely to continue through the end of this year, and probably longer. And as conditions worsen, governors and legislatures will respond as they have before — with cuts in social services, travel bans, hiring freezes and layoffs. Rainy-day funds will be depleted, projects postponed and ambitious plans for addressing problems in infrastructure, education and health care abandoned, at least for now.

But there is one redeeming benefit to the downturn: The pressure to improve how governments are administered will only increase. The fact is that most states have improved the quality of their management in recent years, allowing them to perform better in bad times as well as good. But downturns tend to accelerate the pace of improvement.

A fiscal "crisis is a terrible thing to waste," quips Jennifer M. Granholm, the Democratic governor of Michigan. "Instead, it's a huge opportunity to make management changes that would otherwise be impossible."

She ought to know. Michigan has been in a continual fiscal crisis since the beginning of the last recession in 2000. Since then, the state has lost 400,000 jobs, most of them in manufacturing. Yet Michigan can boast one of the best-managed state governments in the country. This isn't to argue that a necessary ingredient in improving government performance is a lousy economy; in Michigan's case, a tradition of good political leadership from both parties over some time has played a role. But in most states it is a catalyst.

I can speak with some authority on this question, because for the past decade *Governing*, CQ's magazine on state and local government, has worked with the Pew Center on the States in an ambitious program — the Government Performance Project — to grade each state in how well it manages in four key areas: its employees, finances, infrastructure and information. The latest grades were issued last month, after almost a year of research and reporting by journalists, academic experts and their graduate-student assistants — about 40 people in all, who conducted 1,400 interviews and gathered and analyzed mountains of information.

So the conclusions I'm reporting here are hardly off-the-cuff, and they point to one overarching fact. It has been uneven and sometimes halting, but states have been steadily improving their management capacity in most key areas over the past decade or longer. More governors are paying attention to the quality of management, and more are setting measurements of performance, pressuring top managers to meet them and then reporting the results. Party and ideology seem to have little to do with it; in fact, the language of management reform increasingly seems to unify chief executives when ideology does not.

A Rising Bar

In Washington, amazingly little attention traditionally has been paid to management. The old adage is that no one cares about the "M" in the Office of Management and Budget. But there is much more concern in many states, counties and cities, in part because those governments employ 10 times as many people as the federal government, and because states administer more than \$400 billion in federal grant money. So management matters, but efforts to improve it still are overshadowed by politics and policy fights.

This year's Government Performance Project gave an overall score of B– to the states, with probably the most improvement showing in how they handled information and the least in how they managed their people. But overall, there is no question that the bar is being raised. A state may have improved in recent years, in other words, but its grade remains the same because

much more is being asked of it.

That was particularly true in the information category, which has become more important to a state's overall score because the elements that it comprises — planning, goal-setting, measuring performance, disseminating information and evaluating progress — increasingly overlap with the other three areas. Clearly, one reason improvement has been possible is that state governments, despite false starts and failures, have become much more adept at harnessing new information technologies, much as the private sector had earlier.

There is a different story in every state, of course. But I'd pick out a few. Alabama, used to being at the bottom of most lists, finished with a C+. But its upward momentum is clear. In the next ratings, in another two years or so, it's likely that GOP Gov. Bob Riley's ambitious management reform agenda will have pulled the state up above average. The same is true of Georgia, which nudged up into the top tier of states because an ambitious governor, Republican Sonny Perdue, has made it a centerpiece of his administration.

Then there's California. Its overall grade is C, with a failing grade of D+ in handling finances. It's a miserable performance, excused by some by the notion that such a mammoth "nation state" ought to be compared against other countries, not fellow states. That's bunk, and there are a number of high-quality people in the state bureaucracy who know it. The solution to California's deep-rooted problems, as well as many of the other laggards, will be political, not administrative.

Peter Harkness is the editor and publisher of Governing magazine, published by Congressional Quarterly Inc.; For a complete listing of his column, [click here](#)

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Michigan Heart Gallery 2008 Exhibit in Detroit Exhibit helps find adoptive families for foster children

April 10, 2008

What

The 2008 Michigan Heart Gallery, a touring photographic exhibit featuring stirring portraits of 60 Michigan foster children who are waiting to be adopted, is on display at the Detroit YMCA, April 11 through April 30. At the same time, mini-versions of the main Heart Gallery exhibit will also be on display at the Detroit Public Library and at Cadillac Place (the former General Motors headquarters) in Detroit. The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take the pictures that help capture the spirit of the children in the foster care system.

The Michigan Heart Gallery is a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services. Today, in Michigan, there are more than 4,000 children without families. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted into a loving and caring home.

When

April 10-30, 2008

Where

Main exhibit: Detroit YMCA, 1401 Broadway, Detroit, Mich.

Mini exhibit: Detroit Public Library, 121 Gratiot Avenue, Detroit, Mich.
and Cadillac Place, 65 Cadillac Square, Detroit, Mich.

Ten Things you should know:

1. At any given time there are about 4,000 children in Michigan's foster care system who are available and waiting to be adopted.
2. Last year in Michigan almost 2,600 children were adopted through Michigan's foster care system.
3. Most families who adopt are also licensed foster parents or relatives. In fact, last year in Michigan, 93 percent of children adopted from the foster care system were adopted by a foster parent or relative.
4. All adoptive families must go through a family assessment process that includes an education component, background checks, and an exploration of the family's interest in adopting.
5. Because the needs of each child are different, many different types of families are needed. You don't have to be married to adopt, and you don't need to be wealthy or own your own home.
6. Many of the children waiting for adoption are school-age or older, may need to be adopted along with siblings, or may have special placement needs.
7. About 500 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21 transition or "age out" of the foster care system annually. Studies of youths who have left foster care without being adopted have shown they are more likely than those in the general population to not finish high school, be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance. Many find themselves in prison, homeless, or becoming parents at an early age.
8. The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is an information and referral program that can help answer some of your questions about adoption.

Contact

us at (800) 589-6273 or visit our Web site at www.mare.org

9. The Heart Gallery is a project of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. It is our hope the Michigan Heart Gallery will inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child so these children can become part of a loving family and have a chance for a brighter, happier future.
10. Consider fostering, adopting or mentoring a waiting child!